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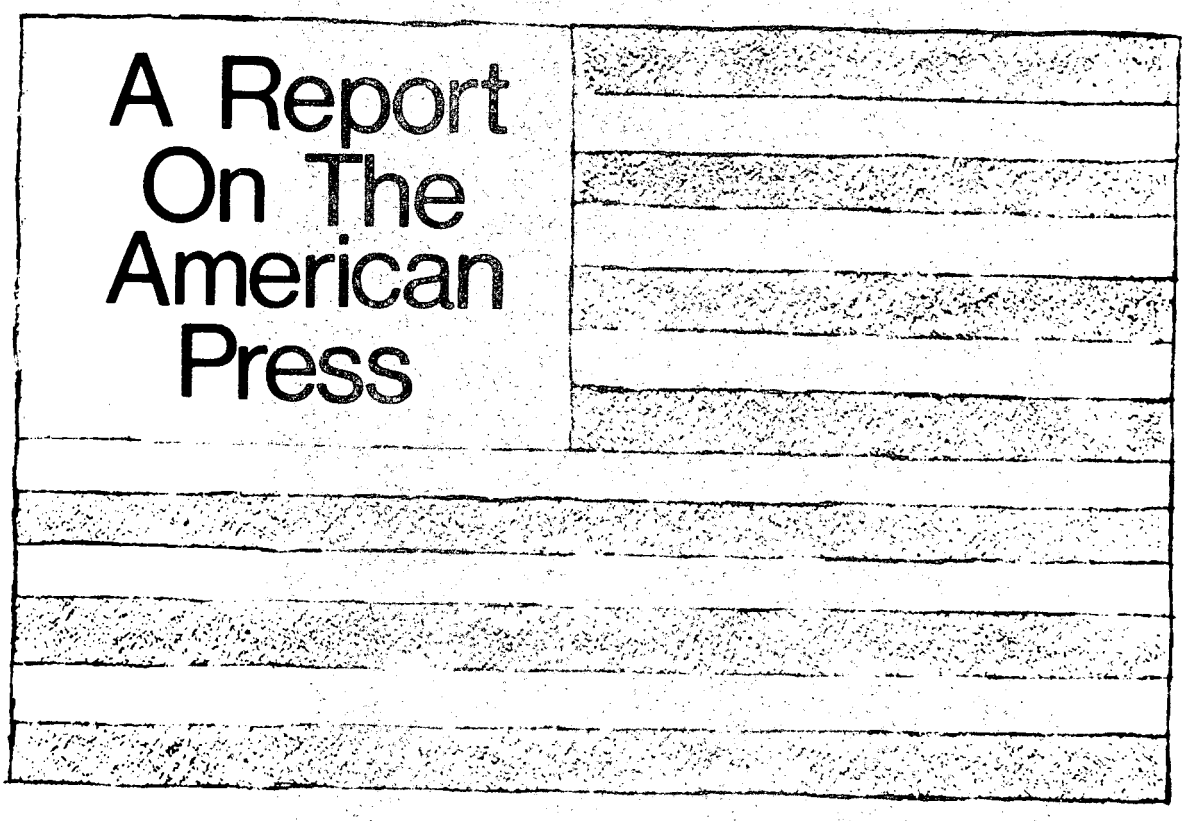
Obituary for Objectivity:



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editor-publisher.....Lanny Friedlander
distribution-production.....David Harlee
subscription services.....Peter Neilson

The editor of REASON is in agreement with the philosophy of Objectivism; however, REASON is not an organ of Objectivism. Except where explicitly stated otherwise, the responsibility for the contents belongs to the editor and authors.

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THE JUDGE AND THE JUNGLE -- A PREFACE

The death of objectivity is no recent crime. We are just late in reporting it. The atrocities committed by the national press in its coverage of the Chicago riots near last summers' Democratic Convention brought the matter to the attention of the public, but it was a dead issue, a revisiting of an old gravesite. Attempts to revive the ancient master were doomed to fail.

Those who might have wished to seek justice for the slaying learned that the courts are packed. When the national press is philosophically corrupt, where does one print the accusation? If the presiding judge, most of the mass media, believes subjectivity a virtue, and objectivity a nuisance, if not an evil, and if the jury (the public) apathetically agrees, then acquittal is all but certain.

Then the felon will go free, to flaunt his guilt, knowing full well his evil will go unchallenged. Thus said Newsweek last summer, in response to widespread criticism: "Newsmen should be willing to dismiss the illusion that there is such a thing a 'pure objectivity' in reporting."

As a comment on the state of the art, Newsweek's admonition would be a good one: to hold that today's reporting is objective would be to entertain an obvious delusion. But Newsweek's recommendation was not meant as social comment; it was a statement of purpose -- and practice.

You may be interested in the verdict handed down by Newsweek's rivals, in view of this open confession. Time, best in a position to profit from Newsweek's errors, passed down a most revealing finding in its publisher's page of Sept. 20, 1968.

Objectivity? --Time asked quizzically, with an exaggerated frown. "We don't believe in it. We never have." Objectivity, it asserted, "is

THE SAVAGE, THE SYLLOGISM, AND THE REVOLUTION

Objectivity is the concept of justice applied to the field of journalism. Justice requires that each man be treated precisely as he deserves, with no exceptions. Objectivity requires that each word, fact, opinion, and syllogism be handled with the same high level of precision.

Just as law without justice is a cruel preversion, journalism without objectivity is an obscene contradiction-in terms. It is also cheap fraud: what would be your verdict of the judge who declared that justice is impossible and yet continued to practice? What, then, is your judgement of the newsmagazine that asserts that a proper handling of the news is impossible?

Time claims that it strives not for objectivity, but for fairness. Such a statement is suspect; to handle the news fairly is to handle it objectively. Is not justice fair? Time's false distinction is simple deceit, involving crass disrespect for journalism, objectivity, and fairness.

In an attempt to dissuade its readers from expecting honesty in its reporting, Time has strung up an emaciated strawman which it calls objectivity: "complete neutrality on public questions and important news," news reporting without viewpoint, emotion, or purpose. Hanging limply above the village square, this deformed dummy has been the easy target for a slew of editorial stones. "Anyone who was objective," David Brinkley was quoted as saying, in the March 4th issue, "would be some sort of vegetable."

Brinkley's claim is Time's surrogate for sophistication. Objectivity is a concept pertaining to the human mind only; vegetables don't think. Riding on the crest of uncontrolled emotion, it is Time's subjectivism that comes closest to simulating the mental state of "some sort of vegetable." But it cannot quite achieve it; vegetables don't feel, either.

More parrot than carrot, Time is part of a national conspiracy of carbon copies that call themselves independent newsmagazines yet display remarkably similar (and remarkably wrong, as well) positions on a wide range of issues. Whether Time is the transmitter or merely one repeater in this sewing circle of professional cynicism is irrelevent; what is important is the recognition that, to the extent to which the doctrine of non-objectivity is practiced, the inevitable result will be journalistic echolalia. After dismissing reason, all that is left is rote.

The cause and effect relationship between non-objectivity and non-independent journalistic stature is eloquently demonstrated in Time's own letter on objectivity. As critical as this issue is, Time chose not to prove the validity of its case, but merely to assert it, and add,

modern philosophy. Such a product could not exist: zero is zero.)

How completely modern philosophy has succeeded in the destruction of journalism as a discipline may be seen in a study of that magazine's position on objectivity. Time's attack and misrepresentation of objectivity is in principle much the same as modern philosophy's "refutation" of reason. Both are attacks on the basic structure of the respective disciplines.

Journalism involves a process of identifying aspects of reality and setting the results to paper for publication. It differs from other forms of non-fiction mostly in terms of audience and subject matter.

Objectivity is the method by which the journalist (or any man) identifies attributes of reality. It is the recognition that emotions are not a means of cognition, that existence exists, independent of man's perception of it, and that there is but one means of perceiving and understanding it: a process of rational thought. Objectivity is not merely a type of reporting, to be chosen or discarded as one might choose between flavors of ice cream, but the method by which man perceives, identifies, integrates, and validates all sensory information.

Unless an author has successfully engaged in a process of thought guided by objective standards, his product will not so much be writing as it will be mere sentences. The claim that objective journalism is impossible is true only if transposed to read: journalism without objectivity is impossible.

The same rules that apply to writing about physics apply also to the study of human events. There is no rational reason to place humanity outside the law of casuality. The journalist is required, as is the scientist, to record what happens, not what was desired to happen. If a journalist wishes to analyze an event he must adhere to the same strict rules of evidence as must the scientist. He must present undoctored facts, and only relevant facts. This requires thought and thus objectivity. Here, then, is where a magazine like Time which asserts: "the proper recording of each fact requires a dozen judgements and thus opinions," falls on its face. If a scientist were to declare: "The scientific method is absurd; I use my emotions instead," you would not hire him to wash floors, much less study social ills. Yet, in essense, this is what Time is saying.

To understand human events, the same rigerous logic and grimness of purpose is demanded of the journalist as is of the researcher who studies atomic reactions, mathematical equations, or the lines of stress in the steel skeleton of a building. The lives of hundreds of millions may be dependent on the scientist's thoroughness and accuracy. If he allows the slightest trace of emotion to enter into his equations, the result could be the disaster of a nuclear accident or the calamity of a collapsed skyscraper. The destruction wreaked by journalistic malpractice is no less real and may be even more extensive.

When a scientist wishes to draw conclusions from his data, he is required to engage in a process of logic. If he wishes to convince others he must meet stiff criteria: the steps of his thinking and the source of his information must be clear, his data must be reproducable

Observe that Time has gayly glued together words of contradictory meaning, not realizing (or not wishing to realize) that the result is worse than babytalk (a baby is desperately trying to make sense; Time is desperately trying not to).

The man who cannot separate fact from feeling (opinion), cannot claim knowledge of anything, let alone that truth consists of an "interplay" between what exists and what he feels exists. Yet this is the same magazine that on June 21, 1968 recommended all American guns be registered by government -- on October 18, 1968 asserted that George Wallace was leading a "revolt of the right" (REASON, December '68) -- on December 13, 1968 recommended "welfare as a right" -- on January 10, 1969 argued in favor of a volunteer army.

Were these positions, in fact, valid, or mere opinion? It hardly matters in Time's Alice-in-Wonderland world, in which the two, fact and opinion, are almost interchangable, if only one takes care to check the "interplay." (We can't help but wonder who -- or what -- determines the acceptable ratio in the"interplay" between fact and opinion.)

Time is probably both representative and in leadership of much of the "liberal" (a euphorism for "the in-crowd") press, the conductor of a symphony of tape-players all playing the same tape. As goes Time, so, it seems, goes the rest of the parade. If this is so, then the situation, as far as objectivity is concerned, is inauspicious, to say the least.

If the situation is to be saved, if the integrity of journalism is to be recaptured from the purveyors of packaged paradoxes, it is Alice's Wonderland which must be thrown out. Life is not a bowl of contradictions, and all the city rooms in the nation won't make it so. If journalism is again to offer anything more cogent than a dulling recapitulation of threadbare bromides and dubious dialectic, subjectivism must be challenged at its root. Revealing the press as inaccurate in any specific instance will not suffice when distortion is the rule, and not the exception.

What is needed is total revolution, a complete reexamination of the concept of objectivity as it applies to journalism. The smug media establishment must be challenged. To this revolution, this magazine dedicates its efforts. It will be a bloodless revolt, a brushing away of cobwebs, for the "ruling class" passed away long ago, assasination victims of a long line of man-killers, beginning with Kant. Just as the establishment's only task consists of dispensing fog, ours will consist of dispersing it.

EDITOR'S NOTES:

°The following paragraph should have appeared in the "black capitalism" article last month on page 9, between paragraphs 2 and 3: "Life's PRIDE is not the only coin that turns out to be little more than a counterfeit slug; since last summer, most major newsmagazines have taken up the banner of "black capitalism" -- with about the same imprecision and ignorance."

of last spring's destruction, which included the burning of a history professor's papers, representing ten years work.

While the Federal Communication Commission was voting, 6-1 on Feb. 5, to ban cigarette advertising from television and radio, The American Tobacco Company was running (and is still running) advertising with such claims as "U.S. government report...found Carlton lowest in 'tar' ...." Thus does American Tobacco sanction its own persecution.

"Gloom hung thick over the group of 100 'prominent intellectuals' assembled in Manhattan at a 'theatre for ideas.' The question for discussion was 'The End of the Rationalist Tradition?' -- and the answer seemed obvious. Pronounced Poet Robert Lowell: 'The world is absolutely out of control now, and its not going to be saved by reason or unreason.' Said Author Leslie Fiedler: 'Reason, although dead, holds us with an embrace that looks like a lovers' embrace but turns out to be rigor mortis. Unless we're necrophiles, we'd better let go.'" (from the March 14th issue of Time)

Author Fiedler may not have realized it, but she identified both a perfect leitmotif for the "theater for ideas" and an ideal description of those who attended when she said "we're necrophiles."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR:

Gentlemen: Today I received my copy of the most recent REASON. More precisely, I received the first and only the first ten pages. Please correct this situation as soon as possible.

Ron Neff
Bloomington, Ind.

Readers who have received damaged copies need only write and we will be happy to replace them, no charge. --Ed.

INTELLECTUALS' MARKETPLACE (entries will be printed free of charge):
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oWanted: Lawyer or individual knowledgable of objective law to correspond about various issues, including the proper use of the computer by government in a free society, the method by which claims would be handled in the event of large scale private weather control (by insurance companies, for example), and copyright. Out of the correspondence will develop next fall's articles. Please write the editor.

A note about our readers (to encourage advertising in the Intellectuals Marketplace): Our readers now total about 250. Recent response to ads, as well as letterheads and personal knowledge, indicates that the large portion are professionals. Environmental Design's February ad drew inquiries and resumes of amazing quality. Our request for individuals knowledgable in the fields of aviation and drug research brought a remarkable reply from a married couple (she a biochemist, he an aircraft engineer). If you have a service to offer, or wish to find competence in any field, simply write us. There is no charge for ads in this section.